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McCleary, James Thompson

The national game

[Philadelphia]

[1913]

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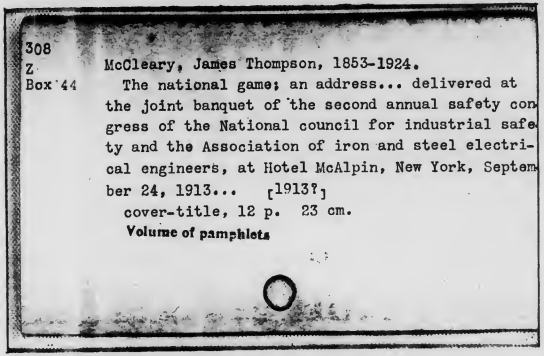

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The National Game

An Address

By

JAMES THOMPSON McCLEARY

Secretary, American Iron and Steel Institute, New York
Member of Congress from Minnesota, 1893-1907

Delivered at the Joint Banquet of the Second Annual Safety Congress of the National Council for Industrial Safety and the Association of Iron and Steel Electrical Engineers, at Hotel McAlpin, New York, September 24, 1913

Toastmaster

HON. JOHN K. TENER, Governor of Pennsylvania

Sent out with the Compliments of George H. Paine, Philadelphia, Pa.

JAMES T. McCLEARY'S ADDRESS.

Mr. Toastmaster, Ladies and Gentlemen:

The introduction by our distinguished toastmaster, Governor Tener, was very gracious and generous, but anyone with half an eye can see who is the "big gun" of this occasion. (Laughter and applause.)

It would be unwise in me to undertake to tell you gentlemen of the Safety Congress how to achieve safety in your several fields. You know more about that than I do. If I should undertake to tell you about it I would be somewhat in the position of the young man who was walking along the seashore with a fair maiden. They sat down side by side near the water, facing the sea. She had a large umbrella which she opened and placed over her shoulder, the shoulder next to the young man. He slipped his arm around her waist and their faces came close together. There was a moment of expectancy —but nothing happened. With a little giggle the young lady said, "I didn't know but you were going to try to kiss me." To this the young man stammered the answer, "I did think of that, but I have sand in my mouth." Quickly retorted the maiden, "Swallow it, you need it in your system." (Laughter and applause.) I would need in my system more sand than I possess to feel brave enough to advise you on the technicalities of your very important work. I shall speak to you on a cognate subject which is in intimate, but not immediately obvious, relation to the work of this meeting.

It is a great pleasure to see so many ladies present. Their interest in this work will promote its success. History tells us that most of the good work done by men is inspired and aided by good women. (Applause.)

Love and Light.

Some years ago it was my good fortune to spend some time in the imperial city that "sat upon her seven hills of beauty and ruled the world." Of course we went to each of those seven

hills, including the Palatine Hill, on which had stood the palace of the Cæsars. The outline of the palace was still to be seen. Here the walls were level with the ground; there higher than one's knee. Here they were as high as one's head; there higher than the hands could reach. We went into a great room, about as long as this room and twice as wide. This, we were told, had been the throne room. One end of this room was semi-circular. At the center of the half circle had stood the throne of Cæsar. I took a position near where the throne had stood and gave free rein to my fancy. In imagination I rebuilt that great palace, placed Cæsar again on the throne, with royal robes about his person and in his hands and on his head the symbols of authority. I repeopled that room with the pride and chivalry of that imperial city. Then in the midst of that pomp and power I asked myself to think of someone there present raising the question, "When nineteen centuries shall have rolled away, whose influence will be greater in the world, that of the mighty man who sits here on the throne, the man at whose words men tremble, or that of a certain carpenter now walking the streets of Nazareth?" Probably if that question had then been asked it would have seemed too foolish to require an answer. Then I came out of my dream and looked around. The palace had crumbled; only broken walls marked the place where it had stood. The throne was gone, as was the influence of the man who had occupied it. But as I looked out over the broken walls upon the mighty city I saw on all sides the heavenward-pointing spires of churches erected in honor of that Carpenter of Nazareth. And I remembered that what I saw in this city could be seen in other cities in all parts of the globe. The dominion of Cæsar had for centuries been ended; that of the Carpenter of Nazareth was covering the earth, extending far beyond the proudest limits ever achieved by imperial Rome. Then came to me the question, "What is the essential significance of this?" The answer was not hard to find. The power of Cæsar rested on force, that of the Nazarene on love; and the lesson was that love is stronger than force, more enduring than power. (Applause.) And love is the cornerstone of the structure you are building. Your answer to the question of old is, "Yes, I am my brother's keeper." But to accomplish worthy results something more than love is required. With love there must be light; with heart there must be head; with sentiment there must be sense.

A female elephant walking through the jungle inadvertently put her foot on a mother bird endeavoring to guard her nest near by. Looking down and seeing what she had done, the elephant's heart was touched. Addressing the chicks in the nest, she said, "I did not mean to kill your mother. That is the last thing in the world that I would intentionally do. I have been a mother myself and I know what a mother's feelings are. But I have killed her, and now what should I do about it? Evidently I should do my utmost to take her place, and do what she would do." And the elephant sat down upon the nest! (Laughter and applause.) The motive was admirable, but the result was disastrous; and this disastrous result fell precisely on those whom it was intended to serve. How often we find emulators of the elephant. How many good people there are who have it in their hearts to transform earth into heaven, but whose proposals, if carried out, would work in the other direction.

The National Game.

The toast to which I am to respond is "The National Game." My friend, Governor Tener, was not quite sure from this title whether I would discuss baseball or activities at Washington. As usual, he is right; and in this case doubly right. I propose to say a few words about baseball, with possible reference to things at the national capital.

When I was a boy I was very much interested in the game of baseball, and I have never gotten over being something of a fan. In my boyhood I saw the game with more clearness of physical vision than I see it now. But now, older grown, I see the game plus things that it signifies.

The Dependence of the Many on the Few.

Not long ago I saw a game that was witnessed by some 50,000 people. The grandstand was full of people, and so were

the bleachers. The hillsides commanding a view of the grounds were covered with people, as were also the housetops. Then I recalled seeing in front of newspaper bulletin boards in this city thousands of people watching the game. And I knew that similar thousands were assembled in other cities throughout the land watching this same game. I also knew from observation that hosts of men going home on the street cars would open their evening paper first at the place where the game was reported. Literally millions of people were watching that game or seeking a report of it. Millions of people were interested in it and deriving pleasure from it. And yet as I looked out upon the grounds where the game itself was being played the men engaged in the game were only a handful, less than fifty all told. What did that signify? The obvious thing was that millions were deriving pleasure from the performance of a few. And the thought occurred to me that that represented a great truth of immensely broad application, namely, that now and always the many are dependent upon the few. Every great movement that has resulted in benefit to mankind has been originated and led by one or two people, and its policies have been planned and carried out by a few to the benefit of the many. He is no true friend of the many who seeks to cultivate in their hearts the spirit of envy and antagonism toward the few. (Applause.)

The Rules of the Game.

After the game had begun I noticed that it was played according to rule. The batter could not always run even if he hit the ball. Sometimes as the ball flew high through the air a man on the ground, speaking with authority, called out "foul." Neither the batter nor any player on his side was allowed to secure advantage through a foul hit. Those on the bases had all to return to the base from which they had started, and wait until the ball was back in the hands of the pitcher. This rule seemed to meet universal approval. And this suggested to me that the people generally are opposed to gains acquired through foul means. They stand squarely for fair

play. And in this is implied the right of each player to make as many "home runs" as he fairly can.

Then I asked myself, who made these rules? Were they made by men who knew and loved the game? Or were they made by men who neither knew nor cared for the game, by men who could not pitch or catch or field or bat or run bases? You know the answer. The men who made these rules had a thorough knowledge of the game and a profound love for it. This is why the game lives and flourishes. This is why the handful of men in the Polo Grounds in New York City command the attention of millions in all parts of the world. And now the question arises as to the other national game, the immensely bigger and more important game, the one played in Washington. Candidly, is it well for the American people to have men make the rules of business who know little or nothing about business? Isn't it time that the American people awoke to the fact that rules to govern business made by men themselves incapable of conducting business cannot reasonably be expected to be in the interest of the American people?

With this thought came another: Were the rules in that baseball game made with the view of encouraging or discouraging skill? You all know the answer. The development of skill on the part of every player is promoted, not retarded. Again referring to that great national game in Washington, can there be any doubt of the result to this country if the rules adopted at Washington have as their fundamental purpose the discouragement of skill in business?

The Umpire.

On the baseball field I noticed one man who was not active in the game—that is, he was not playing on either side. They called him the Umpire. Sometimes he made decisions that from my point of view were clearly wrong. And I was inclined to feel resentful about them. But my sober second sense asserted itself and I concluded that, as he knew ten times as much about the game as I did and was so situated that he could see the plays to be passed upon far better than I could,

he was probably right and I was wrong. As a rule, his decisions seemed to have the approval of the crowd. But on one occasion if the crowd could have got at him they would have run him off the field. Ask yourselves the question and answer it, "Which was probably right, the umpire or the crowd?" And answer another question, "Would the welfare of the game have been promoted or retarded if the mob could have interfered with his decisions?" Were the decisions more likely or less likely to be fair to all concerned if he could make them regardless of what the spectators thought?

I remember reading in a publication of very wide circulation an article on baseball by Connie Mack (applause), who seems to be known to you all as one of the greatest baseball generals that the game has ever known. In this article Mr. Mack said that in the early days of baseball the umpire felt constrained to decide close questions always in favor of the home team. And Mr. Mack added, and the significance of his satement cannot be over-estimated, that the game never flourished until the independence of the umpire was assured. Mr. Mack was thinking of baseball. I do not need to point out to an audience as intelligent as this that Mr. Mack's statement is significant when applied to the other and greater national game to which I have referred, and to the umpires therein provided for.

Equality of Opportunity.

All that any person has a right to ask is a reasonably fair show for his white alley. Much is being said by men who demand equality of opportunity. Many of them make this demand in perfect good faith, prompted by a spirit of equity in their souls. Others demand it simply as a mouth-filling phrase, appealing for their own purposes to what is fair and reasonable in the hearts of others. With many who are loudest in their demand the thing itself is the last thing on earth that they desire. As a matter of fact they do not wish equality of opportunity; what they really demand is equality of result. And many of them appear to be oblivious to the fact that the only way to secure equality of result is to deny equality of opportunity.

Five boys are starting to run a race. Will not the judges of the race have performed their full duty when they see that the start is a fair one, that the track is kept free from unfair obstruction, and that no runner fouls another? Suppose that after the boys have been running a few minutes, one of them forges to the front and it becomes clear that he will win the race, leaving the others far in the rear. Suppose that the judges determine that the swiftest runner shall be hobbled "to gives the other boys a chance." Suppose they do hobble him, will he have had a fair show? Will he have had his equality of opportunity? Supposing that the judges should determine that all the boys shall cross the winning line at exactly the same instant, how can that result be brought about? Clearly in only one way, by hobbling each boy in direct proportion to his speed. This illustrates my general proposition that equality of result can be obtained only by denying equality of opportunity. Those who stand for equality of result should frankly say so, and not pretend to stand for equality of opportunity.

Equality of opportunity implies the right to inequality of result, and with equality of opportunity or anything approaching it, there will always be inequality of result. And why? Because God does not make men equal. They are not equal physically. They are not equal mentally. They are not equal morally. And no one knew this better than that great Virginian who penned the Declaration of Independence. And when he said therein "All men are created equal," he did not mean that they were equal in any of their endowments, but that they had an equal right to a fair show before the law. Jefferson stood for equality of opportunity in fact as nearly as that was humanly possible. Equality of opportunity means that the man of one talent and the man of many talents should each have a fair opportunity to do the most and the best of which he is capable, and secure the fair reward therefor. (Applause.)

Suppose that in the race that I have referred to no boy was permitted to win, what would be the result? Inevitably in that community boys would cease to be good runners. Why? Because the motive for struggling to acquire speed would be taken

away. And suppose that this great nation of ours should deliberately adopt the policy of hobbling and harassing and annoying men of capacity, what will be the inevitable result? We will become a nation of weaklings, of men who cannot achieve, a by-word and a reproach among nations. (Applause.)

I have in mind a country where this deplorable result has been reached along this precise pathway. The country that I have in mind has been endowed by the Almighty with vast resources, and yet the nation and its people are poor. Why? Because it is the rule in that country that the man who begins to achieve success has to meet not only the envy and detraction which seems inevitable in such cases, but success seems to be regarded as sin, and the government itself lays its heavy hand upon him and takes away from him unfairly what he has fairly won. The result I have told you. The country is poor, but not all are equally poor. Even there the strong are able to take care of themselves much better than the weak. The chief sufferers are the weak and not the strong. Conversely the chief gainers of fair treatment would be the weak rather than the strong. The weak need the strong vastly more than the strong need the weak.

The Value of Leadership.

My friend, Governor Tener, kindly spoke of me as having lived in Minnesota. For more than thirty years my home was in the great North Star State. I am always proud of being introduced as coming from Minnesota. During the great contest waged in this country fifty years ago to determine "whether a nation so conceived and so dedicated could long endure," Minnesota, then sparsely settled, gave of her small population many regiments to the Union army. One of these regiments did at Gettysburg a deed of valor not exceeded since Thermopylæ. One of the other Minnesota regiments surrendered to an inferior force in the first battle that it entered. Minnesota loves to think of the First Minnesota at Gettysburg and the Second Minnesota at Chickamauga, but she tries to forget the act of the other regiment that dishonored her name.

It is the second day of the battle of Gettysburg. In a way not necessary to describe, the Union line was weakened by the removal of troops so that only one regiment remained to guard that center. Over on Seminary Ridge, the confederate general, Longstreet, saw that break in the Union line. Rightly resolved to take advantage of this mistake, he ordered ten thousand men to charge across the valley on this weak place. At the same instant the Union general, Hancock, rode up; discovered the weak place in the line; found one regiment endeavoring to do the duty of twenty. Riding up to this handful of men he demanded of the Colonel, "What regiment is this?" To which Colonel Colville promptly answered, "The First Minnesota, sir." Pointing to the thousands of men in gray charging across the valley, General Hancock said, "Stop these men." Promptly Colonel Colville commanded his less than three hundred men, "Forward, the First Minnesota, double quick, charge!" And although the men knew that they were outnumbered thirty to one, they leaped to the charge with such impetuosity that the gallant men in gray were checked, the precious minutes gave General Hancock a chance to bring up reinforcements, and the Union victory at Gettysburg became possible. (Applause.)

Why did one Minnesota regiment bring to the state renown while the other brought only shame? The men in the nameless regiment were just as brave and just as patriotic as those in the First Minnesota as they showed later under proper conditions. Why the different result? Because at the head of the First Minnesota was Colonel Colville like Leonidas at Thermopylæ, a man fit to lead, while the nameless regiment was commanded by a coward and a poltroon. The difference was not in the men but in the leaders.

Leadership is one of the world's most precious possessions. For the common good, leadership should be cherished and encouraged and allowed to reap its full reward. This is the lesson which this beloved country of ours must take to heart. It must continue to keep wide open for everyone, for the man of one talent and for the man of many talents, the golden gate of opportunity. Fair treatment for great and small, for rich and

poor, for corporation and individual man, must be the rule of law. Then shall the safety of the Great Republic be assured. Then shall the National Game be played to a successful finish. Then shall our country achieve a destiny honorable to our people and worthy of our God-given opportunities. (Applause.)

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